

NEWS TRAVELS

ARC Travel Services' News and Views



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The Director's Corner – *Travel on the Move*

By Diana Bonnell

Ten years ago, ARC Travel Services began providing travel management and travel payment services to a few federal agencies. Today, we support over 40 travel programs and continue to add to our growing list of customers and services. In addition to supporting the E-Gov Travel System, GovTrip, we offer a variety of associated services including credit card administration, travel policy guidance, post payment auditing, centrally-billed account



reconciliation, travel payment processing, help desk support, travel system administration, E-Gov Travel System training, consulting, and full relocation services.

Providing quality travel services to federal agencies has been

our goal since the inception. It has been an exciting journey as we have seen technology, federal travel, and the organization evolve. As we focus on the future, we realize that the capacity to grow in size while maintaining a high level of service is important. Beginning in May, our staff will be moving to a new building that can accommodate that growth. Once the move is finalized, our new TDY Branch fax and direct numbers will be provided to our customers closer to the

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ARC Travel Services would like to welcome aboard the Farm Credit Administration

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move date. Our e-mail address and help desk phone number will remain the same.

Thank you all for being part of the journey. We look forward to servicing you from our new location. 



Bureau of the Public Debt, Avery Street, Parkersburg, WV

What's In Your Wallet?

by Pam Enlow



With the government-wide focus on reducing travel and purchase credit card abuse by Federal employees, agencies have been tasked to improve credit card programs. The Office of Management and Budget issued standard requirements in its new policy “Improving Government Charge Card Management” released as Appendix B to OMB Circular A-123. This guidance became effective October 1, 2005, and is intended to ensure controls are in place to reduce the risk of fraud, misuse, and late payments. To view a copy of OMB Circular A-123, Appendix B, visit www.whitehouse.gov/omb/financial/fia_travel.html.

Some of the risk management elements required in Appendix B are currently in place for the travel card program of the Bureau of the Public Debt (BPD). While this article may be BPD specific, other agencies may have similar controls in place.

- Authorization controls include cycle limits, ATM cash limits, and blocked merchants.
- BPD's Director of the Division of Financial Management (DFM) reviews the Citibank Travel Charge Card reports for questionable transactions, excessive ATM cash withdrawals, cash withdrawals with no associated travel, transactions at the permanent duty station, and

delinquencies. Employees are contacted for an explanation when these activities are discovered and are reminded of their responsibilities.

- Labor Relations works with DFM on corrective actions when potential problems are identified.
- Split disbursement divides a travel reimbursement between Citibank and the cardholder. The split disbursement process was addressed in the Winter 2006 issue of *News Travels*.
- When requested by Citibank, BPD will assist in the collection of undisputed delinquent charges through salary offset.

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Other elements of Appendix B include:

- Charge card management training. Charge card managers and cardholders must understand their respective roles and responsibilities of the travel card program.
- Credit worthiness assessments. All **new** travel charge card applicants must have a credit worthiness assessment to ensure they are financially responsible. Treasury and Citibank are working together to develop a process to meet this requirement. Until that process is defined, Treasury has advised the bureaus to issue "restricted" cards to new applicants. The cycle limit has been reduced for these cards.


Watch for future information on these two items.

According to GSA, the most serious problem with the individual travel card program is payment delinquency. Cardholders must pay all undisputed charges in full by the billing due date on the statement.

Using split disbursement within GovTrip, airfare, lodging, and rental car charges are sent directly to Citibank. Travelers can also direct other expenses to the charge card by changing the method of reimbursement to GOVCC.

Cardholders can view their Citibank account online to see the most recent charges as well as previous statements. Once the merchant sends a transaction to Citibank, it is generally posted to an account within 48 hours. By viewing the statement at the same time a voucher is prepared, a traveler could decide to send an "Add'l Gov't

Charge Card Payment" amount to Citibank. This could include restaurant charges and ATM withdrawals. Several travelers calculate right to the penny how much to send to Citibank for each trip. For information on how to access your statement online, view <https://www.onlines-tatements.cards.citidirect.com/>. For help in reconciling your credit card statement, check out the article "Citibank Statement Reconciliation Tips" in this issue of *News Travels*.

The government travel card in your wallet is for authorized official travel only. Cardholders are responsible for using it appropriately and making payments timely. If you have any questions about the proper use of your travel card, please contact ARC Travel Services at 304-480-8000, option 1. 

"We Make Government Travel Easy"



*Our customer service staff is here to help you from
7am to 6pm EST, M-F
Call us at (304) 480-8000, option 1, for travel questions*


GovTrip Vouchering Tips



- 1. Remember your authorization is an estimate of your expenses.** You need to verify all expenses claimed in your voucher before submitting for approval. This includes any ticket and TMC fee amounts entered by American Express (AMEX).
- 2. Verify the ticket amount with the invoice received from AMEX when tickets were issued.** Changes made through AMEX's emergency after-hours service may not be reflected on your authorization and you will need to update the ticket amount.
- 3. Verify TMC fees are correct.** Again, changes made through AMEX's emergency services may not be reflected in your authorization.
- 4. Update expenses to reflect the actual amounts. Remember to check method of reimbursement.** Any expenses you want paid to your credit card through split disbursement should have GOVCC as the method of reimbursement (see table below.)

Expenses

Non-Mileage:	No.	Expense Type	Date	Cost	Method of Reimbursement
Edit	1.	TMC FEE (GOVCC-I)	01/16/06	\$5.25	GOVCC
Edit	2.	BUSINESS CALL/INTERNET	01/16/06	\$11.00	GOVCC
Edit	3.	GAS-RENTAL/GOVMT VEHICLE	01/16/06	\$50.00	TRAVELER
Edit	4.	TAXES: LODGING-DOMESTIC	01/16/06	\$20.00	GOVCC
	5.	TAV Fee -I	01/16/06	\$16.25	GOVCC
Total:				\$102.50	

- 5. Verify lodging and per diem reimbursement is correct.** GovTrip automatically enters lodging and per diem amounts according to the per diem location selected in your itinerary. If you altered your trip, you will need to adjust your itinerary to reflect the correct dates. You will also need to adjust your M&IE to reflect any meals provided or leave/personal time used.
- 6. You can verify the amount to be paid to your credit card on the Payment Totals page under Additional Options.** The amount can be adjusted to include any meals charged to your credit card by adding this amount under Add'l Gov't Charge Card Payment then selecting calculate.
- 7. Verify receipts are attached before submitting your voucher for approval.** 

Citibank Statement Reconciliation Tips

1. Reconcile monthly.
2. If you start at a point where your account has a zero dollar balance, it will be much easier to reconcile.
3. Check the amounts that were billed to your Citibank statement versus what you are claiming on your voucher. Any remaining charges left on the statement need to be entered as an additional charge card payment on the Payment Totals page.


Government Charge Card Amount	
Expenses on Gov't Charge Card:	\$ 390.25
Gov't Charge Card ATM Advance:	<input type="text" value="0.00"/>
Add'l Gov't Charge Card Payment:	\$ <input type="text" value="34.35"/> Calculate
Total Gov't Charge Card Amount:	\$ 424.60

4. **Verify the Travel Management Center (TMC) fees are correct.** On occasion we have found that the TMC fees were not updated in the documents. TMC fees normally have the Passenger Name Record (PNR) locator number (also known as Confirmation Number or Record Locator Number) beside it on your statement.

post date	tran date	merchant	amount	status	note	type
08/11/2005	08/10/2005	AMEX FEE EOCFSP	\$ 28.50			✓

(This number can be found in your document under the ticket information.)

Confirmation: EOCFSP
Ticket: EOCFSP-CP

5. Remember the TAV fee is not charged to your Citibank statement until your approving official approves your voucher.
6. Any reservations made with SATO (International Reservations) or the after-hours office of American Express will not automatically be updated in the traveler's documents; therefore, you must manually enter the amount of airfare.
7. Sign up for your on-line statements. You will be able to view current items posted to your account by going to <http://www.cards.citidirect.com/welcome.asp>.
8. If you need a password or your client code, contact Citibank at 1-800-790-7206. 

FedRooms—Government Lodging Made Easy

By Krista Shold, FedRooms

Finding hotels that meet government standards and travelers' needs has historically been a long and arduous process for Federal travelers and meeting planners. Travelers would search and compare hotel rates, seeking compliance to Federal government per diems and policy standards. In an effort to simplify this process, the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) re-launched its government-wide lodging program in 2004, now called FedRooms.

Today's Program

It has been more than 16 months since GSA partnered with Carlson Wagonlit's Hotel Solutions Group to redesign the government's transient lodging program, and a lot has happened in a short amount of time. The government-wide lodging program has undergone several significant changes. One of the most obvious is the transition from the legacy program's name, FPLP, to the new program name, **FedRooms**. Additionally, the number of participating properties in the FedRooms program has quadrupled, increasing from just over 600 in 2004 to more than 2,500. That number is

expected to increase to more than 3,000 by the end of 2006. In order to participate in FedRooms, each property must meet the following criteria:

- Rates offered are at or below per diem
- Properties are FEMA-certified
- Properties offer cancellation deadlines of 4pm or later day of arrival
- Properties have a 2-star or higher rating

In addition to FedRooms rates being available for government transient travel, several properties are extending their rates for **small groups and meetings (up to 25 people)**, leisure travel, and for use by government contractors. Properties offering these rates will be available via the FedRooms hotel search website (www.fedroomssearch.com) in the 2nd quarter of FY2006.

Why use FedRooms?

FedRooms takes the guesswork out of booking hotels. Travelers can be confident that the rooms they are booking through the FedRooms program are compliant with government policy without having to do any

research. In fact, FedRooms standards are better than corporate best practices. No corporation has negotiated rates that offer cancellation deadline of 4pm day of arrival, nor can they claim that 70% of their rates offer last room availability. These benefits are exclusive to the FedRooms program.

By booking the FedRooms rate, travelers will continue to increase government business at participating properties. This will provide FedRooms the leverage to negotiate more competitive rates as the program matures. To date, FedRooms has saved the Federal government an average of \$13 off per diem, and \$23 off consortia.

How can travelers access FedRooms?

The FedRooms team has worked hard to ensure the availability of FedRooms rates (XVU rate access code in the GDS) across all booking channels within the Federal government to comply with individual government agency booking policies.

The Department of Treasury has implemented travelers on the GovTrip booking tool. Within

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this tool, properties offering the FedRooms rate are identified with the words "FedRooms Property" within the search results. To access the FedRooms rate, travelers must first click on the FedRooms property, and then select the FedRooms rate. The FedRooms rate may not always be the lowest rate available in the system, but will generate the greatest value, saving travelers any add-on fees, penalties, or cancellation charges.

The FedRooms search site, www.fedroomssearch.com,

offers travelers a single point-of-access to search and access FedRooms rates. Through the site, travelers can enter search parameters and generate a list of results within the specified search area that meet travelers' requirements, as listed above. However, GovTrip should be used for booking rooms at the FedRooms rates.

The FedRooms rate can also be accessed through Travel Management Centers (TMCs) or calls to the hotel directly. In order to ensure the cost savings

and benefits of the FedRooms program, travelers should always ask for and confirm the FedRooms rate by name.

NOTE: The FedRooms rate (rate access code XVU) and the government rate (rate access code GOV) are **NOT** the same. The government rate (GOV) is unmanaged and may include hidden fees and varying cancellation policies. To ensure maximum government cost savings and program benefits, travelers should always confirm the receipt of the FedRooms rate. 

New SATO International Collect Calls Phone Number

American Express Travel Assistance

M - F 8:00 – 8:00 EST	(800) 423-7458
After Hours	(800) 847-0242
International Collect	(313) 271-7887
Access Code	S8M5A

SATO

M – F 8:30 – 5:30 EST	(800) 816-1870
After Hours	(800) 827-7777
International Collect Calls	(210) 877-3255

ARC Travel Services

M-F 7am to 6pm	(304) 480-8000, option 1
Travel email	travel@bpd.treas.gov
Relocation Services	(304) 480-8469

PCS – What are WTA and RITA?

Nothing is simple when it comes to taxes!

When a Federal Government employee relocates to another permanent duty station and relocation benefits are approved, many of the reimbursement amounts received are taxable and must be reported as income to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). As a result, Federal Income Tax, applicable Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA), Medicare taxes and state income taxes, for certain states will be withheld from taxable entitlements on the vouchers.

W-2's are prepared during January of each year for employees who have received taxable relocation reimbursements during the previous year. This W-2 will be sent separately from the individual's yearly wages.

The Withholding Tax Allowance (WTA) is an additional benefit available to Federal employees who are relocating to a new duty station and are authorized relo-

cation benefits. WTA is intended to offset most of the burden of Federal income taxes incurred due to additional income from the relocation and is added to the reimbursements through a gross up calculation.

When W-2's for relocation are sent out in January of each year,



a transfer employee who qualifies for WTA will also receive a Relocation Income Tax Allowance (RITA) Certification Statement. Since taxes on relocation reimbursements are withheld at a flat rate throughout the year as vouchers are filed, the transfer employee must complete the certification statement and provide copies of W-2's and other earned income. The tax rate applied when all income is

considered may vary from the rate calculated on reimbursements throughout the year. The RITA calculation is an adjustment to bring the WTA closer to the employee's actual Federal income tax liability. Relocation Services Branch (RSB) will process a RITA voucher for the difference. The recalculation may result in an additional payment to the employee or in some cases may result in a collection. If the recalculation results in a debt, then the traveler will need to repay the excess amount.

As noted above, taxes can get complicated when some relocation expenses are reimbursed. Although RSB can answer many questions about the Federal Travel Regulation requirements and calculations, relocating employees are advised to consult with a tax professional when filing their income taxes during the period they are relocating for the Government.

Do you have a relocation question? Give us a call at 304-480-8469.

On a flight from Anchorage to Tokyo, the flight engineer went back into the passenger cabin. An elderly woman stopped him and asked him what the temperature was. It's 70 degrees madam he replied, adding, but outside it's 30 degrees below zero. Young Man!!! the woman demanded, WHAT WERE YOU DOING OUTSIDE?!!!



Travel Approving Official Responsibilities

By Dan Carozza

Much is said about what travelers can and cannot do while on official travel, but little is ever said about the responsibilities of a travel approving official.

Anyone who has ever traveled has had an approving official review his or her travel documents. Few approving officials realize their responsibilities in approving travel documents.

Approving officials are tasked under the United States Code and the Federal Travel Regulations (FTR) to assume ultimate responsibility for the validity of travel claims. Approving officials must ensure all claims are proper and prepared in accordance with regulations and agency policies prior to authorizing them for payment. (Travelers must also ensure all expenses are prudent and necessary).

Approving officials must authorize travel only when the travel is essential to the mission of their agency. Approving officials must consider the following factors in approving all travel:

- The need for the travel;
- Use of travel substitutes (e.g., mail, teleconferencing, etc.);

- The most cost effective routing and means of accomplishing travel; and
- Employee travel plans, including plans to take leave while on travel.

All approving officials should take into account the following when approving a claim (voucher):

- The approving official should have full knowledge of the employee's activities;
- Claims must be properly prepared in accordance with regulation/procedures;
- The travel authorization should be available in GovTrip for review;
- Expenses claimed are authorized and allowable;
- Amounts claimed are accurate; and
- Any required receipts are attached to the voucher and examined.

Approving officials must also become familiar with the provisions in the FTR concerning items such as:

- Mode(s) of transportation to authorize;
- Requirements to take a non-contract carrier and the justification needed;

- Restrictions for flying first class;
- Expenses that are allowable and disallowable;
- How travel should be arranged (GovTrip is required);
- Conditions where actual expense or reduced per diems may be authorized; and
- Conditions applying to an employee with a disability, special need, etc.

Approval of travel vouchers in GovTrip must be completed within seven business days of notification. (Travelers must submit a claim for reimbursement within five business days of completing the trip.)

Approving officials should disallow claims when expenses are not properly itemized, receipts or other documentation to support the claim is not provided, or if there is a claim for an unauthorized expense. In cases of disallowed claims, the approving official must pay the employee the amount of the travel claim which is not in dispute and notify the employee of the portion of the denied claim as well as instructions to the employee on how to appeal the disallowance


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if desired, and what is involved in the appeal.

As can be seen, approving officials have a great responsibility when it comes to authorizing and approving travel. If an approving official or traveler

were to remember only one thing in their list of responsibilities, that would be what is stated in the FTR as to the standard of care that must be used in incurring expenses: "You must exercise the same care in incurring expenses that a prudent person

would exercise if traveling on personal business." Think of it as if you were spending your own money. Would this expense be prudent and necessary? Nine out of ten times, you will have your answer when it comes to incurring expenses. 

What's New In Relocation Services Branch

By Beth Wright

The Relocation Services Branch has successfully completed the conversion of moveLINQ Version 2.1. Some of the highlights of the new version include:

- The capability to withhold state taxes;

- The functionality to calculate the employer contribution tax amount and include it in the authorization total; and
- A detailed authorization form that prints a separate section for each allowance.

We are eagerly awaiting the next

release of moveLINQ 3.0, DOD Version, which will contain the functional enhancements necessary to support our Commissioned Corps customers. This version of the software is expected in early May of this year. 